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ABSTRACT

The Chicago public schools have implemented two dropout prevention programs in five high schools. The Early Action Opportunity Centers program gives priority to identified potential dropouts who have records of entanglement with law enforcement agencies. Fifty percent of the students in the Chicago Receptions Center program are returnees from state correctional institutions or are on probation from juvenile court. The broad objectives of the centers are the prevention, control, and elimination of delinquent behavior through innovative interaction activities correlated with a broad, comprehensive dropout prevention and crime reduction program. The five centers use two broad approaches--the community-organization approach that involves the home, school, special agencies, law enforcement agencies, and community organizations and institutions; and the work-role approach that involves finding employment for the students. Each program has components dealing with education, counseling, vocation, recreation, and research. (Author/IRT)

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EFFECTIVE DROPOUT PREVENTION PROGRAMS
(Clinic A-9)

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Schools today are increasingly called upon for a greater range of curriculum changes than ever before. This extension of the schools' traditional services is consistent with a new emphasis on changes in the system to keep pace with the changing needs of the students served. Only as all of experiences become more appropriate to student needs will there be a lessening of the task of holding young people in school until they have received a high school diploma.

One of the major efforts in the Chicago public schools in combating the problem of keeping young people in school until graduation has been the implementation of two dropout prevention programs in five Chicago public high schools within the past four years.

Both of these dropout prevention programs, the Early Action Opportunity Centers program and the Chicago Reception Centers project, have been funded by the Illinois Law Enforcement Commissions (ILEC). The Chicago Reception Centers program is a cooperative project of the Board of Education of the City of Chicago and the Juvenile Division of the Illinois Department of Corrections, and the Early Action Opportunity Centers Program is implemented solely by the Board of Education. Both programs have as their major objectives the reduction of dropout rates in the target high schools and the reduction of juvenile delinquent behavior in the communities in which the target high schools are located.

The major difference between the programs is in the stipulation that the Early Action Opportunity Centers program must give priority for acceptance to identified potential dropouts referred to the program who have records of entanglement with law enforcement agencies. On the other side of the coin, in the Chicago Reception Centers project, 50 percent of

the student enrollees must be returnees from a state correctional institution or on probation from Juvenile Court.

Both programs emanated from concern expressed by educators and civic leaders over the need for rechanneling the energies of the potential and identified dropout and delinquent into positive endeavors beneficial to both the person and society. To meet this need in the Chicago area, these projects proposed and established: 1) five dropout prevention centers for the early identification of potential dropouts and delinquents and for preventive intervention of routinized negative development patterns in both potential and identified dropouts and delinquents; 2) a communication process for bridging the gap between the student and his home, school, and community, and 3) meaningful work opportunities to sustain the changes effected by the planned intervention activities.

The following describes the dropout prevention programs as they have operated in the Chicago public schools.

Participants in the Chicago centers are high school students who fit into the following categories: students who exhibit serious disruptive behavioral patterns; students who are earmarked for social adjustment schools; students who are chronic truants, poor achievers in school, gang members; and students who have been in trouble with juvenile youth officers or who have had more serious entanglements with the law and/or are returnees from state correctional institutions. For the most part, the participants in the centers are students who have psychologically dropped out of school although they may still be present physically. These potential dropouts and delinquents attend the centers program on a part-time basis for remedial academic work and supportive services.

Students are referred to the centers program by high school counselors, elementary school adjustment teachers, community social agencies, truant officers, and parole and probation officers. Referrals are based on criteria developed along the lines of such instruments as Procedures in the Identification of Potential Dropouts, issued by the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Illinois,* and information from the cumulative folders of potential dropouts and delinquents. Student involvement in the centers program is totally voluntary; however, parental involvement, or that of the parole or probation officer, is required for all participants. In addition, a matching number of potential dropouts and delinquents are selected as a control group in the five schools administering the centers for evaluation of the effectiveness of the program.

The broad objectives of the centers are the prevention, control, and elimination of delinquent behavior through innovative and intervention activities correlated with a broad, comprehensive dropout prevention and crime reduction program. The specific objectives are: 1) early identification of dropouts and delinquents; 2) reduction in truancy; 3) reduction in the number of juvenile arrests and encounters with law enforcement agencies; 4) reduction in hostility, as reflected by a decrease in incidence of fighting between students, assaults against teachers, and violation of school regulations, and standards; 5) an increase in school achievement, as reflected by standardized tests, school achievement records, and school grades; 6) an increase in work opportunities, as shown by the number of participants in work placement; 7) a more positive attitude toward school and a greater feeling of belonging, as reflected by attitudinal tests; 8) a closer relationship between the school and

*Currently known as the State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

home, as shown by the number of communications disseminated in the community; and 9) improvement in understanding of the problems of the dropout and the delinquent, as shown by responses on attitudinal tests administered to school staff members.

Counseling, education, vocational-work training and placement, and research and recreation programs comprise the five major components of the centers' services. Data are collected and analyzed continuously and used to develop follow-up programs for students and inservice training for in-school personnel, as well as for other staff members. Students, parents, juvenile officers, and community members are involved in the total program, from the planning stage to the final evaluation.

The five centers serve a total of 300 students. The staff is composed of counselors, teachers (English and mathematics), attendance community youth workers, school-community representatives, and correctional counselors. The five centers are served by one project director, who supervises and coordinates the entire program, and by one school clerk. The EAOC program serves 200 students annually, and the Chicago Reception Centers project serves approximately 100 students per year.

Social and psychological techniques are used to diagnose the variables contributing to alienation, delinquency, and the dropout syndrome. These techniques include participant and nonparticipant interviews, observation, surveys and questionnaires, both cognitive and attitudinal testing, and a careful study of student life histories and other pertinent documents and data. Prescriptions are derived from a careful analysis of each case referred to the centers, and this analysis involves a complete team approach using staff and other professionals in community agencies to

implement diagnostic techniques. The difference between practices in corrective agencies and institutions and the dropout prevention centers is that the latter are concerned not only with therapy and rehabilitation for the participants but also with the change and correction of the social situations contributing to the creation of the problem.

To accomplish this two-part goal, the program for the five centers uses two broad approaches: a) the community-organization approach and b) the work-role approach.

A. The community-organization approach is directed toward strengthening supportive services for the students from the following institutions:

1. Home -- Counseling services are provided for parents as well as for potential and identified dropouts and delinquents, including gang members. Community representatives exchange information between the community and parents and the school. Center staff share specified needs with the counselor and participate in recommending alternatives. Where there are problems involving poverty, the staff makes referrals to appropriate staff members and/or agencies.
2. School -- Effective teaching methods are demonstrated to the regular school personnel in workshops, inservice training, etc. An attempt was made to recruit teachers and counselors who could keep a "cool head, a warm heart, and a firm hand" in their relationships with the students and who could develop understanding relationships which help students feel that school is for and not against them.

3. Social Agencies -- More effective strategies are developed for providing a) recreation, b) employment, c) health care, d) food, and 3) clothing. An increase in these services allows the centers' participants the opportunity to concentrate more on academic pursuits and less on undue engagement in survival activities.

4. Law Enforcement Agencies -- Through working more closely with juvenile departments, probation and parole officers, and treatment centers, more effective services are provided.

5. Community Organizations and Private Agencies and/or Institutions -- Means have been developed to use community talent and resources for the enhancement of the community. School-community representatives and community youth workers correlate community resources with program needs.

B. The work-role approach seeks to give the potential dropout and delinquent an opportunity to develop his full potential through work experiences and rewards. Work-study opportunities have been solicited within the community (e.g., small businesses, stores, etc.) and outside the community where larger industries and businesses are located.

Jobs in municipal law enforcement agencies have also been solicited. This type of a work-program can serve in several ways: 1) it can provide excellent work-study sites for potential dropouts and delinquents, including juvenile delinquents who are interested in such programs; 2) it can strengthen community-police relationships within the target areas; 3) it can act as a deterrent for delinquent behavior within the target communities.

Five components have been designed for the centers.

1. The Educational Component - The teachers assigned to the centers tutor those program participants needing such assistance.

2. The Counseling Component - Counselors, SCRs, correctional counselors, and community youth workers have the major responsibility for offering in-depth, concentrated counseling services to the centers' students and their families.

   An out-of-school setting has also enabled the community youth worker and the SCR to elicit more positive responses from the participants in the effort to help students adjust to the home, school, and community.

3. The Vocational Component - The project director of the centers acts as a job developer for those target group students who are in need of work experiences. With the assistance of the counselors, the director also acts as the liaison person between the work-study programs in the target schools and the centers program. Jobs are solicited within and outside the target communities.

4. The Recreational Component - The community youth workers, with the assistance of the SCRs, develop recreational programs with the student enrollees which involve peer-group planning, participation, and pressures for rehabilitative purposes.

5. The Research Component - Outside evaluators are selected by the funding agency for the evaluation of these programs. They collect data through interviews, observations, surveys and questionnaires, cognitive and affective or attitudinal testing, life histories, and other school documents and data. Interviews, surveys, and questionnaires are administered to a random sample of participants and their parents when an assessment is being made of the success or failure of specific activities or programs. The outside evaluators observe classes, program activities, meetings, etc. They also observe community affairs relating to the project.

Statement of the Problem

The effect of crime on quality education has been long recognized, although not clearly understood. In addition, there is a noted link between delinquency and unemployment. The Chicago Police Department pointed out these correlations in the report Allocation of Resources in the Chicago Police Department:

> The quality of public elementary and secondary education also has important relationships to crime. Schools, themselves, need to be secure and must teach respect for the rule of law. Moreover, unless students leave school equipped to earn a living, unemployment is likely and the prospects for a delinquent career are increased. School dropouts, for example, are more likely to become delinquent than children who remain in school.

Learning difficulties multiply at a rapid rate among students exhibiting the characteristics of the dropout. Lack of achievement and success produces alienation and delinquency.

Although the problem of juvenile delinquency is not exclusive to any one segment of Chicago and is found in varying degrees in all areas of the city, it should be pointed out that there is a high correlation between delinquency patterns, low school achievement patterns, and dropout patterns. The target schools in this project have a high incidence of dropouts, and, inevitably, the community in which they are located has a higher juvenile crime rate than that in areas where the dropout problem is not a serious one.

Statistics on reading and math scores, dropout rates, incidence of juvenile offenses, and the Department of Correction's number of parolees in a given area attest to the validity of the previous statements, since they clearly indicate that a marked correlation does exist among the dropout, low school achievement, and delinquency patterns of the target areas included in this project.

Evaluation

A. Assessment of the effectiveness of the early identification of potential dropouts and delinquents is achieved through a yearly examination of the number of students actually dropping out or displaying delinquent behavior. Success of the program is reflected in a decline in this number.

B. Assessment of supportive services and intervening programs and activities is made from --

   1. An increase in interest in and more positive attitudes toward school, as reflected in responses on attitudinal tests and in field notes on observations of students, parents, and staff

2. A reduction in truancy, as shown by school attendance records
3. A reduction in juvenile offenses and police arrests, as indicated by juvenile officers and police records
4. A reduction in violations of school rules, as indicated by a decrease in school suspensions or penalties appearing in counseling and discipline records.

C. Assessment of immediate, in-depth counseling services will be made from --

1. An increase in resolutions of personal problems, as indicated by student responses to interviews, surveys, and questionnaires and in field notes on observations
2. An increase in work opportunities and work placements
3. A reduction in incidence of fighting, insubordination, and violations of school rules, as shown by school discipline reports and counseling records.

In addition, at the end of each year an assessment of the behavior, attendance, and achievement levels of the experimental group is made through a comparison with the control group to determine the effectiveness of the centers programs in dropout prevention and reduction of delinquent behavior and crime.

Dissemination

Press releases to local and city newspapers have been prepared. Radio stations most frequently listened to in the proposed target areas have been contacted for announcements of the programs and services of the centers.

Interim Evaluation Report

The outside evaluator's interim report for the dropout prevention program presents a conclusion that data from the five centers have substantiated that education is a major factor in the reduction of juvenile crime and that, in turn, a reduction is seen in the recidivism rate of dropout program participants who are returnees from correctional institutions.

The report further indicates that potential dropouts and delinquents enrolled in the programs are in need of a high level of supportive services to perform satisfactorily in a school setting. In order to provide such support, the centers must continue to focus on the early identification of the potential dropout and delinquent. If such services are not forthcoming before the young person becomes too entrenched in truancy and delinquent behavior, then the inevitable occurs--dropping out of school.